

## [Robert and Rosa Lee Scott]

26079

Federal Writers ' Project

Paul Diggs

Lakeland, Florida

[Scout?] , Robert

Combee, Florida

Robert and Rosa Lee Scout

Robert lives in a Negro community called Combee, located three and one-half miles on State road [#?] 17 between Lakeland and Six Mile Creek. [Delapidated?] houses, built of pine and cypress, are scattered through these quarters. they are unpainted and black from exposure to the sun and weather. There are no electric lights no radio, and no running water. The site is considered low land and after a heavy rain it is covered with water. At this season of the year all of the available [planting?] space is set out in strawerries strawberries . Around some of the homes, there is a little space set aside for vegetables . The soil in this section is very rich, and is known [as?] "muck land."

Robert's little farm is located on the left hand side of the State road, #17 sitting back about on quarter mile from the main highway. The oddity of this home, and the crudeness of its construction [makes?] is unique in its appearance.

[Here?] in this humble existence he tries to earn a livelihood for himself and his wife Rosa Lee. He was sitting on a bench in front of the house beside a tub basking in the sunshine.

## Library of Congress

Down the [lane?] he pointed out his wife coming. At my entrance through the gate Robert arose and said, "come in" and went into the house returning with a rocking chair. With the dignity of a Prince he asked me to be seated.

Robert is five feet and ten inches in height, very dark in complexion, ball headed with a little patch of gray hair on each side of his head. His long black mustache hangs over the side of his mouth. When he laughs his missing tooth in the front of his mouth stands out. He keeps his pipe in his mouth all of the 2 time, stating that it was his best friend. His pants were patched and resembled a quilt. His [hat?] was [slutched?] on the side of his head, pulled in the direction of the [?]. Rosa Lee, his wife, reached the house. She had on glasses, and she to had a pipe in her mouth. Rosa said thatshe was fifty two years old , " andwas neatly dress in a mixed colored gingham dress. Her shoes were full of holes to give comfort to her sore feet. They rested themselves on a board on two boxes with logs under each end. A tub was on the other end. This bench was used for the family's washing.

Robert said, "I was born in Richmond County, South Carolina, and the second year after freedom. I remained in South Carolina, until 1901. There I engaged in farming and doing other odd jobs. My parents were Steven and Susan Scott, who were slaves. Their slave [masters?] were [Kellum?] and Scribner. There were five in my family. "

Robert stated that he came to Florida in [1901?], and was a grown man when he reached Florida. He worked in the [turpentine?] stills from place to place. He lived in [Homassa?], Dekota county, seven miles from Arcadia until he moved to his present location in 1926.

Robert stated that he married twice. His first wife was Rosa [Spanish?]. They were married in Arcadia, Florida, in 1914. There was one child born during their wedlock. This child died with the influenza. His second marriage was to Rosa Lee Jupiter. They were married in their present home by Rev. Mitchell, of Lake Wales, March 11th, 1936. He had lived the

## Library of Congress

life of a bachelor [up?] until that time. Before he married, his neice, Annie Graham, make here home with Robert.

3

He has no recollection of any other member of his family, stating that he had not seen them in years. Rosa [spoke?] up and said that she had three sisters, Hattie Jones, Valdosta, Georgia; Eunice Walker, Moultrie, Georgia; and Rachel , who lives in Savannah, Georgia.” Rosa was born in Richmond, Virginia.

“ Robert said, “ we have farmed all of our lives, all I know has been following a mule behind a plow.”

“ You see I only had a little schooling, I can only write my [name?] and that is all. They had no grades when I went to school I was raised by my grandmother Caroline Bryant, and when her eyesight [failed?], I had to stop [school?]; she was and old slave hoe-hand. I stop school to try to make her some bread. The book that I studied [was?] the Blue Back Webster, I went [as?] far as the syllables called Baker. The other part I took up in my head; learning from time to time. An education is something that every man should have, it keeps him from getting cheated. In the olden times a man would get a letter and stick it in the band of his hat, or in the pocket of his shirt, and tote it until he could find somebody to read it. When he did, the sweat from his body had made the writing so [bad?] you could hardly make it out. [About?] this time I began to study [about?] womens and that settled it.”

“ I always wanted a home of my own, and tried hard to have a good [farm?]. I am happy with something growing around me, and some animals to care for. [At?] present I have a few around me, see those fine cows out there in the field. There is three cows and one [fine?] bull, we have a [few?] chicken in the back, and four hogs, thats why I think a fellow should have something of his own. I am always gwine to have something. The good Lord said [that?] he would take care of me, and I am going to see that he does.”

4

## Library of Congress

“I pray hard all of the time, and believe that he [?] my prayers. I [am?] a member of the Baptist Church, I joined [because?] the spirit led me there. That little church you see standing over [yonder?], I am the pastor of it. I have [about?] ten members when they all are present. God called me to reach way back in [1923?].

“ I [believe?] that [every?] man should be govern by his own [mind?]. When I was young I worked on the farm [and sometime hired myself?] out doing odd jobs. I remembered once working [for?] a man all the week, digging [ditches?], we knocked off [a turday at?] twelve oclock. He had hired us at One dollar and seventy five cents [a day?]. He took our [names and said that?] he had to go to the [bank?] in town to get our [money?], we set along [side?] of the road [and?] waited, [and?] waited; but no man [came?] back, finally a white man came along and asked us what we boys we waiting for. We [explained?] to him why we were [waiting?], he said, “that he saw that man in Plant City, fixing his car at [a?] filling station. There we was, we had promised [cap?] at the store that we would pay him for [his rations?], [and?] we were left in [the?] ditch. This has happen to me more than once, folks, [promise?] to pay you and leave you with out [any?] grits.”

“When the [boom?] was on I [made?] from [Three?] to [Four?] dollars a day. Now I [make?] nothin' but [what little food?] I can raise and sell off my [place?], we [can?] hardly sell our vegetables in [Lakeland?], there is so many doing the same thing. I received some assistance [from?] the [old?] age [Assistance?], fifteen dollars a month, which I stretch as far [as I?] can. Through the help of the good Lord I [manage?] to live [some?] how. I manage to keep my little [farm here?], if the [freeze comes?] I will [be?] ruined, I [am?] expecting to [have?] a good strawberry [crop?].

5

While talking, all of a sudden Robert said to his wife, “say sister lets make a bargian- ain't we gwine to cook today ? With a smile beaming all over her face, she answered, sure I is honey.” Rosa arose from the bench and went into the house.

## Library of Congress

After filling his pipe with some Hi-Plane Tobacco. Robert said, " I voted in South Carolina, and I never voted in Florida. Once I started to vote, and was told that a nigger could not vote in a cracker election. So I stayed [from?] the poles every since. I think the government is [picking] up in places like soda when mixed with cornmeal."

" I am not able to do hard work, except what I do [here?] on my little farm, I was ruptured some years ago, and I can't lift anything heavy. I feel good otherwise. When I feel bad I take my sassafras tea, and that brings me around. Over dar' in that shed I keep plenty on hand.

Robert arose and went in the direction of the shed to show me his sassafras herbs. Here he started to explain how he came in possession of his present site. "This land was given to me by Mrs. Graham. Before I lived on the other side of the creek at Castle. I could not raise very [much there?]. The land bein' low and when a heavy rain would come it would drown out all of my crops. After homesteading and paying four dollars a year taxes, she gave me the deeds. I have ten acres- two of htem are cle red, and the rest are woods and swampland. This old peice of house [that?] you see here was built from an old house given tome in Carter. I hauled the lumber one half mile in a whellbarrow and built it myself."

The house was weather-[bearded?], with no [windows?], only board shutters. Laughing [ heargidly? ] heardly Robert said, " If that house had glasses it would [fall?] down. It would'nt stand [any?] glasses."

6

The weather boarding on the out side was rough and the ends [was?] not evenly nailed on, some protruding beyond the end of the house. The top was covered with some old second hand galvanized tin. It was badly bent and [looked?] to be leak proof. The chimney on the east side was very crudely built. It looked like it was ready to fall down. There [was?] a little shed about twenty feet from the house, where he kept his farm tools. It was shackly built with plenty of space between the boarding. The front [was wide?] open, and hanging

## Library of Congress

on the rafters were dried seed and peas used for cooking. In front of the house a well cultivated strawberry patch was in bloom. A crudely built cypress [fence seperated?] the strawberry field from the house.

Along side of the shed was a stack of wood obtained from his land. His whole cleared site was fenced in with cypress poles, cut from the timber land. In the rear of the house there was another acre cleared and part of it was set out in vegetables. In the east corner there was a crudely built enclosure out of cypress poles used to quarter his four hogs. Near this enclosure was the out house with no roof over it. On the north side of the field was a chicken yard, and next to the chicken yard was Robert's rickety built barn. Rosa Lee said " her chicken was given to them for [part payment?] for washing, she did at some of the white folks homes. "The [barn?] was built out of cypress poles and covered with old tin, and boards. The yard space was fenced in. There was [a?] wide gate with space enough for a car or wagon to [pass?] through. In this unsanitary [arrangement?] the [cows?] were milked once a day.

In the interior of their house there [was?] found some home built furniture. In the front room a large fire place was the only [means of?] obtaing obtaining heat. In front of it was irons, Rosa said, 7 " the fire place was used to heat the irons when she ironed. The walls were covered with newspaper and magazines. The floors were bare, with only a small rug on the front room floor. The [boards?] was unevenly matched on the floor and left cracks in between them, you could see the ground and feel the air coming up through them. In this room was a long table without any covering on it, and an old type singer sewing machine. Hanging in the middle of the room from a rafter was a bunch of oranges.

The bed rooms were very crowed, with no way of letting air or light in, except opening the shudders, although there was plenty of air from the [cracks?] in the walls and floor. A shed covered the open space [entering?] the kitchen which set apart from the rest of the house. It was very small, and was crowded with a small wood stove, a wood box, old trunk, [and?] a table filled with dishes.

## Library of Congress

Everything was very clean and orderly arranged in this crude home. They had two barrels near the kitchen with a large [galvanized?] [pipe?] running from the roof to catch the rain water. On top of the barrel was a bag that was used as a filter for the water, and another pipe joined the second barrel with a fine mesh screen and rag over one end. Out of this barrel the water was used. It was clear and clean, and around it was lots of trinkets used in and [around?] the house. Two old time iron pots were close by. With pride he showed me his wagon, which was a wheelbarrow, stating that the horse was not able to pull very much (meaning himself.)

Suddenly the small [bull?] came walking up to the fence that surrounded the house, and they immediately grabbed the long rope dragging behind him, and pulled him away. He [was?] considered to be very dangerous. He was very fat, [having?] the advantage of the good grazing land around the little farm.

In the delapidated shed was a pile of straw, and under it was sweet potatoes. Robert said " that they were kept there to be protected from the frost bite. [I?] have always saved vegetables, when I was in the Spanish American War it saved me from hungry. A many day by knowing what to do with dried vegetable seeds I was able to eat, I enlisted as a soldier in the Spanish American War when I was thirty years old at Summerville, N.C. I was a member of Major Young's Company. We went up from Savannah, Georgia, and started to Cuba, after [landing?] about two o'clock. While out to sea about midnight the boat turned around and headed back to Savannah. There we learned that the war was over, then we were mustered out. We left the dock sing singing and shouting, and every [one?] was on their [way?] home. Lawdy [ussy?] there was [plenty?] of trouble during dem' times, only folks did'nt argue overthings as long as they do now. " Rosa Lee, came back to the yard with a smile, letting her husband know that his meal was ready. He entered the small kitchen and after saying the blessing with reverance, Robert said, " that old lady of mine can cook up a mess. She can do more with fat bacon than a monkey can with [peanuts?]. I like fat meat, pork, collard greens, peas, cabbage, grits, and good corn

## Library of Congress

bread. Now and then I kill a chicken when one of the breatherens [comes?] around. We have plenty of eggs during laying seasons. Our meat supply comes from the hogs that we butcher and salt down, when we run out of green vegetables we fall back on the dried vegetables we [have?] stored away.” 9 Robert's appetite was very good, he asked for the second helping. The syrup that he was using was his own make, [apparently?] he liked it, from the [way?] he soaked his corn bread in it. Rosa said, “ we usually have two meals a day when they are able. she also related [that?] she was a member of the prayer band, they would [meet from?] house to house each week. “ I walk all over this place, we have no other way to get around, some time my old man he walks to Lakeland, he spends his time working on the farm, and keeping busy with his church program. When not working you can find him and that old [stinking?] pipe sitting out front of the house when the weather is good. When it gets cold he comes [inside?] by the fire place. You see by our [wood?] that we are ready for the cold weather. [Some?] time my neighbors come over and talk.” My old lady Robert said, “ goes around more than I do. Ha! Ha ! she is a busy body. Rosa's eyes flashed and she went on with her work. In leaving he invited me back, stating that he liked good company.